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## **Congressional Actions and Public Reactions\***

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## Abstract

This paper explores the link between congressional actions and public attitudes about government responsiveness, public efficacy, and public trust in government.

Congressional actions are moves by members of Congress that are potentially consequential to public opinion. The theory contends that actions taken by Congress influence these perspectives on government within an alert stratum of the public. This relationship is demonstrated by employing a pooled time-series logistical regression modeling data that come from the American National Election Studies merged with historical actions data. The findings support the contention that increased actions by Congress increase public efficacy and trust in government, and also improve public attitudes about government responsiveness.

Habermas (1989) defines the public sphere as a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed, and that access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. He contends that a portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. While Habermas contends that the state is the counterpart to the public sphere, and is not actually part of it. Foucault (1982) challenges the idea of coercion-free space where open deliberation occurs, arguing that the state has influence over the realm of deliberation. In an empirical examination, Mayhew (2000) concurs with Foucault, arguing that the actions of the realm where power resides, the Congress, have an impact on the public sphere, but Mayhew contends that Congress is actually a part of the public sphere. This study offers empirical evidence that the actions of members of Congress affect public opinion implying that the public sphere consists of a dynamic relationship between state and public. The evidence here supports the contention that the actions of Congress are an integral part of the formation of public opinion, and that, Congress is actually a part of the open deliberation.

To deliberate is to think about and discuss issues purposefully before reaching a decision. Both Congress and the public discuss issues and come to decisions, and it can be argued that these discussions are not independent of each other, but rather, they are both part of the same conversation. Congress and the public respond to each other. While most previous research on the dynamic between Congress and the public focuses on constituency influence on Congress (Miller and Stokes 1963; Fiorina 1974; Erikson 1978; Achen 1978; Bartels 1991; McIver et al 1994; Stimson et al 1995; Hill et al 1994; Wood and Hinton-Andersson 1998), an understanding of the effects the institution and its

members has on the public provides a more complete explanation of the dynamic. If the actions of members of Congress (MCs) affect the way the public perceives government, then it is likely that it will affect the way they behave, and in turn, affect the way Congress behaves. Therefore, the dynamic between Congress and the citizenry moves in multiple directions.

The central puzzle of this paper involves exploring the dynamic between Congress and public opinion. More directly the following question will be addressed: How do “congressional actions” affect individual citizen's attitudes about government? Congressional Actions, as defined by Mayhew (2000), are “moves by MCs that are to a significant degree autonomous and consequential-or at least potentially consequential-and are noticed by an alert stratum of the public exactly because of their perceived current or potential consequentiality.” These moves consist of things such as speeches, filibusters, amendments introduced, hearings conducted, presidential bids, maneuvering someone else's presidential nominee, cabinet appointments, considerations for nomination to the Presidency, corruption accusations, or even simply, statements about other's leadership qualities. While there may be many more implications, this paper addresses the consequentiality of these “actions” on public attitudes about government responsiveness, levels of political trust, and levels of political external efficacy. External efficacy is defined as the citizen's evaluation of the level of system responsiveness. These three phenomena are intrinsically linked because they all address broad attitudes about government, and it is unlikely that one would be politically efficacious but have low trust in government, or have high trust in government but feel poorly about government responsiveness.

This study hypothesizes a positive relationship between Congressional actions and the aforementioned perspectives on government. The contention here is that increased activity in Congress may be interpreted by the public as increased representation. A busy Congress is perceived as a representative Congress. Further, a busy Congress is likely to be getting more media attention and the relationship of actions to perspectives should be strongest among those who are most attentive. The argument is that there is a baseline normal level of congressional activity and public attitudes, and as the magnitude of this activity fluctuates around the baseline, the public's attitudes on Congress will fluctuate in the same direction. Most models of public opinion that seek to explain fluctuations in public attitudes consider individual socio-psychological factors but do not consider the actual behavior of representatives. Efficacy, trust, and attitudes about responsiveness are all about perceptions of the actions of government. Therefore, it makes sense that the actions of government would have an effect of attitudes about the actions of government.

While the body of literature regarding the “national policy mood” does not directly propose the same idea, it does provide a framework from which the fluctuating attitudes can be understood. Stimson (1999) defines “policy mood” as shared feelings that move over time and circumstance. Many have used this concept to explain the nature of political change and the relationship between government and the public (Kellstedt 2000; Flemming and Wood 1997; Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995; Jacoby 1994), among others. This study asserts that this general disposition is in part a result of affect towards Congress in the form of attitudes about responsiveness, efficacy levels, and trust government. The fluctuations in attitudes can be described as a “national

mood”. As expectations are exceeded or they are not reached, the public's feeling about Congress as a whole is affected.

Converse (1964) suggested that the public is politically un-attentive, and therefore, it is unlikely that the nuances of congressional activity would seep into the public consciousness in any major way. Others have suggested that the public is more aware than Converse contended (Stokes 1966; Brody and Page 1972; Popkin 1994). The contention here is that those who have public interest, or follow government and public affairs, deliberate within their networks, forming a general disposition in the process. This deliberation may occur in the workplace, as well as in churches (Verba et al 1993). Also, deliberation may occur at home with family (Jennings 1983), and with spouses (Niemi et al 1977). The theory contends that those who are most attentive are most likely to deliberate and will be most affected by the actions of Congress.

### **Perspectives on Government**

Mayhew (2000) proposed that congressional actions play a role in the public sphere in his unique work *America's Congress*. His approach fuses a traditional theoretical perspective with an empirical one, but the uniqueness comes from the dataset he uses to make his argument. This dataset includes actions by individual members of Congress since its first session<sup>i</sup>. While Mayhew's data collection is quite impressive, the full potential of these data is not maximized. He presents the argument that actions are relevant in the public sphere, but then does not offer any systematic test of how these actions interact with the electorate. An empirical examination of the nature of the dynamic between congressional

actions and attitudes about responsiveness, political trust, and external efficacy is one step towards understanding the dynamic between Congress and public opinion.

Miller and Stokes' (1963) seminal work on constituency influence was the beginning of our understanding of political responsiveness. After guiding the study of representation through the 1960's, their study generated criticism, both theoretically and methodologically. Erikson (1978) challenges their findings, asserting that constituency influence is actually greater than they purported. He asserts that their findings were inaccurate as a result of sampling error, and further, that congressional responsiveness is a function of constituency influence guided by parties and elections. Bartels (1991), and McIver, Erikson, and Wright (1994), along with Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson (1995) all find that public opinion does influence congressional behavior. These studies seek to explain responsiveness from the bottom up, while this study seeks to explain attitudes about responsiveness, and government in general, from the top down. The level of responsiveness is likely to affect attitudes about responsiveness, and the contention here is that increased actions may be perceived as increased responsiveness leading to higher efficacy and trust. The relationship is multi-directional.

The nature of individual efficacy in the public has been explored, but the focus has primarily been on its impact on participation levels (Kellstedt 2000; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997; Wolman and Stouder 1991; Wolfsfeld 1986; Pollock III 1983; Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Shaffer 1981). The general argument of these authors is that those with higher levels of efficacy are more likely to participate. From the opposite direction, Finkel (1987, 1985) proposes that participation leads to higher efficacy. While all of these theories help to bring clarity to the concept of efficacy and its implications,



they fail to adequately address causal factors of efficacy levels. Shrivastava (1989) highlights some of the potential causes of differing efficacy levels by comparing students in the United States, the United Kingdom, and India; his research suggests that factors such as income and differing environments affect the levels of efficacy.

The influence that the behavior of officials has on efficacy has been explored by studies contending that negative campaigning decreases efficacy (Ansolabehere et al 1994), which supports the argument that actions taken by public officials affect individual attitudes in the electorate. The theory in this study does not challenge previously asserted causal factors of efficacy, but rather seeks to address another potential explanatory variable- actions- as a supplement to these previously asserted causal factors.

Miller(1974) argues that levels of trust in government can be explained by individual alienation from the two parties positions on issues, while Citrin argues that lowered levels of trust can be explained by dissatisfaction with the incumbent president. Erber and Lau (1990) contend that both of these perspectives can be supported, but the effects are contingent on which cognitive constructs are accessible. This study seeks to expand on this notion, arguing that increased levels of public interest make the actions of Congress cognitively accessible, and this contributes to levels of trust, as well as efficacy and attitudes about responsiveness. This dynamic can best be described as a flow of information between Congress and the public.

## Data and Methods

### Data

The attitude indicators *attitudes about responsiveness*, *external efficacy*, trust in government and all control variables are obtained from the American National Election Studies (ANES), made available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. Data from 1964-1988 (every two years, N=24,263) were the only years included in the analysis because the attitudinal measures collectively spanned this period. The congressional actions data were merged with the ANES dataset, and were obtained from David Mayhew's website (<http://pantheon.yale.edu/dmayhew/datasets.html>).

This dataset includes 2,304 cases that Mayhew painstakingly extracted from 5 “general” history texts and 33 volumes of “era” history. Mayhew scanned the index of each text for MCs names, cross-checking this with the *Biographical Directory of the American Congress*. He then looked under the entry to see if the text contained an action carried out by the respective MC, and then tagged this as an item for the dataset. Finally, he read each volume, cover to cover, to identify any actions that he may have missed.

Mayhew's subjectivity is imposed on some of the decisions to include or exclude certain actions when the texts includes quotes from MCs that were not particularly noteworthy, but for the most part it was a straightforward process. It also required Mayhew to synthesize some of the discrepancies between the texts. These biases are not particularly threatening to the validity of this study because the actions will be aggregated and the bulk of the items in the dataset were not controversial. Mayhew also offered a

code to distinguish the number of texts any particular item appeared in, but this study utilizes all of the actions in the dataset. Each action was coded individually to correspond with their respective MC. The assumption is that if the action was important enough to be included in a historical text, then it is likely that it was important enough for individuals within the public to take notice penetrating the public sphere. In addition, the historical texts utilized data gathered from newspapers, which supports the argument that these actions penetrated the public realm where deliberation occurs.

### Methods

The unit of analysis is the individual, with the actions indicator serving as a contextual variable, as it is constant across each legislative cycle. This contextual effect can be methodologically thought of in the same way as a “national mood” indicator. It is an aggregate stimulus that each respondent experiences and processes individually. The effects are tested from context to context. A series of graphical examples that exhibit the pattern between actions and the attitude indicators will be exhibited, followed by three pooled time-series ordered logistical regression models that include the outcome variables *attitude about government responsiveness*, *external efficacy*, *trust in government*, modeled as a function of the total number of actions, public interest, party identification, the difference in affect toward the parties, socio-economic status, and prospective personal financial situation. These models also include the interaction of the total number of actions and public interest. These interactions serve to address the contention that the effect of actions will be more intense for those that are more attentive to public affairs. Because the actions are constant across all respondents in each

legislative cycle the variation being measured for this indicator is the mean change in attitude about government responsiveness, external efficacy, and trust in government.

Because it is not reasonable to assume that the errors in this time-series regression are independent, the correlation within each vector of the explanatory variables and outcome variables was plotted using correlograms to visually determine if there is autocorrelation within each vector (see Hibbs 1974; Fox 1997; for an application also see Oren 1996). Assuming a first-order autocorrelation process the correlograms indicated no discernible pattern of decay exponentially towards 0, and therefore, the values of these variables at time(t) are not dependent on the values at time(t-1). It is not necessary to lag any of these variables, and a pooled time-series ordered logistical regression is suitable.

#### *Operationalization of Outcome Variables*

*Attitudes about responsiveness* were measured using an additive index. Respondents were asked the following questions: 1) Over the years, how much attention do you feel the government pays to what the people think when it decides what to do -- a good deal, some, or not much? and 2) How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think, a good deal, some, or not much? To construct this variable, these components were first recoded as not much = 0, some = 50, and a good deal = 100. The recoded values were then summed and divided by the number of items, and then rounded to 0, 25, 50, 75, and 100. A factor analysis indicates that these items cluster around one factor, and reliability analysis indicates that they can be combined ( $\alpha = 0.547$ ). While this alpha level is not extremely high, it is sufficient to create an additive index of these items.

*External efficacy* was measured by reading the respondent the following statements and asking them to state whether they agreed, disagreed, or neither agreed or disagreed with the statement: 1) I don't think public officials care much what people like me think, and 2) People like me have no say in what government does.<sup>ii</sup> The responses were coded a 0, 100, and 50 respectively. They were then added together and divided by the total number of items. The summed totals were then rounded to 0, 25, 50, 75, and 100. Factor analysis indicates that these items cluster along one factor, and reliability analysis supports creating an additive index ( $\alpha = 0.606$ ).

*Trust in government* was also measured using an additive index. The respondents were asked the following questions: 1) How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right -- just about always, most of the time or only some of the time? 2) Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests, is looking out for themselves, or that it is run for the benefit of all the people? 3) Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it? And 4) Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are (1964-1972: a little) crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked (1964-1972: at all)? The responses were ordered to have the same direction and then they were summed accordingly. To construct this variable, the responses were recoded as follows: 1) 1=0, 2=33, 3=67, 4=100; 2) 1=0, 2=100; 3) and 4) 1=0, 2=50, 3=100. The recoded values are then totaled and divided by the number and divided by the number of items. These values were then rounded to 0, 25, 50, 75, and 100. Again factor analysis indicates that

these items cluster along the same factor, and reliability analysis confirms the appropriateness of creating an additive index ( $\alpha = 0.694$ ).

--insert Table 1 about here--

As previously mentioned, attitudes about responsiveness, external efficacy, and trust in government are all intrinsically linked because they each broadly address attitudes about government. Each are correlated with the other and group along one factor supporting the contention that there is some underlying commonality between them (refer to *Table 1*).

#### *Operationalization of Explanatory Variables*

The first and primary explanatory variable used in the analyses is the *MC Actions* (See Appendix for a complete listing of all of the categories of “action” types). The *Actions* were summed to obtain the total number of actions by legislative cycle. The actions in the years directly preceding the ANES year of study were combined. For example, 1966 ANES data was merged with the summed actions from 1965 and 1966. This was done because it is expected that the effects of the actions of MCs in the time directly preceding and leading up to the time of the ANES survey will drive citizens' attitudes because these actions are at the forefront of the consciousness of individuals. The assertion is that the accumulation of recent actions culminates into an effect on public attitudes, and that changing legislative cycles are an appropriate point from which to survey this effect.

*Public interest* is intended to gauge the attentiveness of the public. There was no media exposure item in the dataset that was constant across the time period being examined, but public interest indirectly measures media exposure. This measure also more directly addresses attentiveness to government affairs than a general media

exposure indicator. It is operationalized using the following question: Some people seem to follow (1964: think about) what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all? The idea here is that actions are likely to have the greatest effect on those that pay more attention to government.

*Party identification* was simply measured by asking the respondent which party they felt closest to, and then responses were coded as Democrat, Independent, Republican, and Apolitical. Dummy variables were created for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. The apolitical response is left out as a reference category. This indicator is included as a control because it is unlikely that high actions by the opposing party of the respondent's identification will have a positive effect on their assessments of government. As a further control of party identification effects, the difference in the *affect toward the parties* was included. The respondents were asked to rate how they felt about each of the parties on a scale with 0 being the worse and 100 being the best. The difference was computed by subtracting the Republican affect from the Democratic affect, and then the absolute value of the computation was used. This simple mathematical measure is intended to ascertain individual's level of concern for which party is in control. If the difference is large, then it is likely that these respondents would be more favorable of one of the parties. In addition, the sign of the difference indicates which party they are more favorable towards. Higher favorability of Democrats will result in a positive sign and higher favorability of the Republicans results in a negative sign.

*Socio-economic status* was measured using an index of level of education and income. Education was coded as follows: 1) Grade school or less (0-8 grades), 2) High school (12 grades or fewer, including non-college training if applicable), 3) Some College (13 grades or more but no degree), and 4) College or advanced degree. Income was self-reported and categorized as follows: 1) 0 to 16<sup>th</sup> percentile, 2) 17<sup>th</sup> to 33<sup>rd</sup> percentile, 3) 34<sup>th</sup> to 67<sup>th</sup> percentile, 4.) 68<sup>th</sup> to 95<sup>th</sup> percentile, and 5) 96<sup>th</sup> to 100<sup>th</sup> percentile. The responses clustered along the same factor, and reliability analysis indicated that an additive index was suitable ( $\alpha = 0.563$ ). This was included as a control because previous research has identified a positive relationship between income and efficacy (Shrivastava 1989)(  $r=0.300$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ). There is also a positive relationship between socio-economic status and attitudes about responsiveness (  $r=0.115$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ), as well as a positive relationship with trust in government ( $r=0.034$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ). While the magnitude of these relationships is not large, it is sufficient enough to include as a control.

*Prospective personal financial situation* was included as a control because previous research has indicated a relationship between economic expectations and congressional approval (Durr et al 1997; Parker 1977). This indicator was measured using the following question: Now looking ahead and thinking about the next few years, do you expect your financial situation will stay about the way it is now, get better, or get worse (1964), and Now looking ahead--do you think that a year from now (1966-1970: you people; 1972,1974: you [and your family]; 1976 and later: you [and your family living here]) will be better off financially or worse off, or just about the same as now? The order of the responses was recoded to make interpretation more clear by putting the



stay about the same as a middle category, with worse off as the first category. The variation in the indicator was unavoidable, but the concept being measured is still has the same substance.

--insert Figure 1 about here--

## Findings

In order to show that actions matter, it is first necessary to show that there is some fluctuation in the magnitude of actions across time. The argument is that individuals have some expectation of Congress and when this expectation is exceeded or not reached this affects individuals' assessment of the institution. These expectations are dependent on the normal level of output and activity of the institution. *Figure 1* provides a visual representation of the number of actions per legislative cycle.

While *Figure 1* allows us to look at the changes in the number of actions by legislative cycle, it does not provide a good representation of the shifting dynamic of actions and attitudes about government together. *Figure 2* allows us to examine these relationships. Because actions and the attitudes indicators are measured on different scales, with the attitude scales being ordinal and bounded by 100 and actions are continuous exceeding 100 for some

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\begin{figure}\caption{\textsc{Actions, Efficacy, Trust, and Attitudes about  
Responsiveness}}\end{figure}
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legislative cycles, summing the values for each variable per legislative cycle allows us to see how they move together. Upon examining *Figure 2*, it appears that there is a relationship wherein increasing and decreasing actions correspond with the summed perspectives for actions. Because these indicators are summed, *Figure 2* exhibits the aggregate contextual effects. Also, it is important to remember that these data were organized to include the attitudes of the respondents immediately following the recorded legislative cycle actions. It is expected that it take time for these actions to penetrate the collective consciousness of the public.

Referring to *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*, there is a clear rise in actions from 1972-1974, and then a huge jump in 1978. These are the periods of Watergate and the Carter administration. It seems counter-intuitive that attitudes about government would improve in these periods because the public was clearly not favorable of either presidency, or at least not favorable of Nixon after the Watergate affair, but the graphs indicate that this is the case. This indicates that while assessments of the President are likely to be low, evaluations of Congress are not. The negative circumstances surrounding the presidents in these periods may provide an opportunity for Congress to separate itself from the presidency and affect the nature of its public image.

Congressional investigations into the Watergate scandal could give MCs the image of ardent representatives of the public interest, leading to rising evaluations of government. In the period from 1972-1974 there were a total of twelve investigative actions (Mayhew 2000). As a result of the allegations by Woodward and Bernstein in the

*Washington Post*, Senator Mike Mansfield, the Democratic majority leader, decided that there was sufficient need for a select Senate investigative committee in 1973 (Blum1991). He appointed Senator Samuel Ervin, Jr. as the chairman of this committee and this action was included in the dataset. The public potentially perceived this action, as well as the actions taken by Ervin, as actions seeking to represent their interest.

Why such an extreme boost of actions in 1978? As can be seen in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2* the legislative cycle preceding the 1977-78 cycle was one of extremely low actions. Of particular interest is the shift of what Mayhew (2000) refers to as opposition actions or actions aimed at thwarting, or impairing the standing of a presidential administration. In the 1975-76 cycle there were only two opposition actions, while in the 1977-78 cycle there were 20, or ten times as many. Furthermore, in the 1975-76 cycle both of the opposition actions were carried out by members of Congress that were Democrats, the opposing party of the president at the time, Gerald Ford. Conversely, 80% of the opposition actions in the 1977-78 cycle were carried out by members of Carter's own party. The logic of why this would lead to improving evaluations of government is that Carter was not a particularly popular president (Gallup Poll shows approval ratings dipping as low as 28%), and the public could see the actions of Congress in opposition to Carter as a representative response to their disfavor of the President.

In 1978, Edward Kennedy, a Democrat considered to be particularly more liberal than President Carter engaged in a bitter dispute with the President over health insurance. Kennedy developed a health insurance plan in opposition to Carter's proposal. Cohn (1978) stated in the *Washington Post* that "the plan (health insurance) grew out of Kennedy's and labor's dissatisfaction with proposals issued by Carter". It is likely that

this conflict between Kennedy and Carter, where Kennedy supported a more liberal plan, could be perceived by liberal individuals as congressional representation of their interests.

The differences between Kennedy and Carter were publicized well beyond the health insurance issues. One of the actions included in the dataset was an attack on Carter by Kennedy at a party conference. The accumulation of these opposition actions led Carter to go so far as to deny that the differences with Kennedy were indicative of a schism within the Democratic Party, while Kennedy contended that these differences were fundamental (Tolchin 1978). This conflict is an example of how congressional representation can serve to influence the public by opposing the president. These individuals include both members of the electorate and MCs. The public's cognitive processing of MC actions may be guided by a growing dissatisfaction with the President, and MCs may offer substantively different actions to the deliberation, which in turn interacts with the public in a way that affects their attitudes. While there are many more actions included in the dataset in these years (1972-1974, 1978), the example of the types of actions in these sub-eras begins to paint a picture of the relationship between actions and attitudes about government.

--insert Table 2 about here--

While the graphical modeling paints the picture of the relationship between attitudes about government responsiveness, efficacy, and trust, it does not offer a sufficient test of the relationship. The models in *Table 2* offer a test of each relationship, respectively. The main effects indicate that there is a significant and positive relationship between the total number of congressional actions per legislative cycle and trust in

government, the level of individual external efficacy, and attitudes about responsiveness. Congressional actions are positively significant when holding public interest at 0 for all three models, when controlling for the other effects. This tells us that actions act as a contextual variable that influences all of these attitudes. Further, the interaction of total congressional actions and public interest is significant across all three models offering support to the theory that actions matter most for those with higher attentiveness to public affairs.

Collectively the models offer support to the contention that actions matter because they individually perform well. The other explanatory and control variables are consistently significant across all three models, with some minor variation. Therefore, the controls are actually demonstrating positive effect, but do not explain all of the variance, as the actions indicators in each model are still significant. Given that there are over 20,000 cases in the pooled dataset and there are strong theoretical reasons to include all of the controls, it should be expected that controls are significant. Their significance adds to the strength of the actions finding because it effectively controls for alternatives assuring that the relationship is not spurious. Although all of the models perform well, the attitude about responsiveness model performs the best of the three as every variable in the model is significant at the 0.01 level. The pseudo  $R^2$  improves in all three models by including actions as an explanatory variable, but shows the most improvement in the attitudes about responsiveness model. The pseudo  $R^2$  for each of these models excluding the actions indicator is 0.012 for the trust model, .106 for the efficacy model, and 0.029 for the attitude about responsiveness model. As indicated in *Table 2* the pseudo  $R^2$  for each is 0.024, 0.113, and 0.054 respectively, when the actions indicator is included.

The relationship between public interest with efficacy, attitude about responsiveness, and trust in government is significantly positively related when holding congressional actions at 0 and controlling for the other effects. This finding is interesting because one may suspect that those who pay more attention to the actions of government would feel less favorable about government, but as the data indicates those who are most attentive feel more favorable.

The primary reason for including party identification in the models was not because there was an expected relationship between party identification and the outcome indicators, but rather to serve as a control for the effects of actions. As previously mentioned, it should not be expected that increased actions by Democrats would be positively associated with the outcome indicators for those that identify with the Republican Party and vice versa. It is intriguing that Republican identification and Independent identification (except in the trust model) is positively associated with all three indicators when controlling for other factors, considering that the Democrats controlled Congress throughout the time period in the sample. Democratic Party identification is positively and significantly related to all three attitudes, but it is important to remember that these are simply controls and not explanatory factors.

Some speculation of party effects may still be offered using the results of the difference in affect indicator. It seems that affect toward the parties and party identification are distinct from each other in the context of these outcome indicators because there is a positive relationship with Democratic identification but a negative relationship with increased favorability of Democrats over Republicans. Those that strongly identify with a party are likely to give them higher thermometer scores (  $r =$

0.461,  $p \leq .01$ ), and Republican identification is significantly positively correlated with the Republican thermometer ( $r = 0.356$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ), while giving the opposition lower scores (Democrat Identification is significantly negatively correlated with the Republican thermometer ( $r = -0.357$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ), and Republican identification is significantly negatively correlated with the Democratic thermometer ( $r = -0.443$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ), so thermometer readings and party identification are correlated, but those that identify with the Republican Party, are likely to have higher efficacy, trust, and feel better about government responsiveness. This is perhaps a result of differences between Republicans and Democrats in the context of the socio-economic status. Because there is a positive and significant relationship between socio-economic status and all three indicators, and identifying as a Republican is positively correlated with socio-economic status ( $r = 0.180$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ) and identifying as a Democrat is negatively correlated with socio-economic status ( $r = -0.128$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ), perhaps, the positive relationship between affect toward Republicans and the three outcomes is actually a product of the mediating effect of socio-economic status. Further, the difference between Democrats and Republicans in socio-economic status is significant (Pearson  $\chi^2 = 673.984$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ).

These results do not contradict previous findings that income is positively associated with efficacy (Kimball and Patterson 1997; Shrivastava 1989). The importance of the socio-economic status indicator in this model is that it does not absorb the variance in the perceptions outcome variables eliminating the significant relationship with congressional actions. Attitudes about the prospective personal finances of the respondents are consistent with these findings. As individual's attitude about their

financial future improves, it appears that there is a positive effect on their attitude about responsiveness and their level of trust.

## **Discussion**

This study has sought to paint a picture of the relationship between congressional actions and the citizenry's perspectives on government. In doing so, evidence has been provided to demonstrate the positive relationship between congressional actions and individual attitudes about responsiveness, external efficacy, and trust in government. This is a dynamic relationship that depends on the attentiveness of individuals to public affairs. These findings speak towards theories that contend that the public is unaware of the daily business of Congress. While only an alert stratum of the public may be aware of some of the details of Congress's daily business, it appears that the aggregation of the actions that make up this business actually penetrate the consciousness of the public. Both Congress and the public are engaged in open deliberation, and demonstrating that the actions of MCs have an impact on public opinion supports the contention that the deliberation of each is not mutually exclusive. Congress and the public are simultaneously engaged in the same deliberation.

This finding is particularly important because it suggests that what Congress does matters in the formation of public opinion. Therefore, models of public opinion should consider the behavior of MCs when describing the formation and development of individual attitudes. Most models of public opinion consider individual socio - psychological factors but do not consider the actual behavior of representatives. This



study does not contend that the factors are not important but rather that we can have a more full understanding of the dynamics of public opinion if we consider both factors. The suggestion here is not that every model of public opinion includes a measure of actions, but rather, that every model should consider the behavior of political figures when seeking to explain an attitude that is directly related to the behavior of political figures. Efficacy, trust, and attitudes about responsiveness are all about perceptions of the actions of government. Therefore, it makes sense that the actions of government would have an effect of attitudes about the actions of government.

One potential weakness of this study is that it fails to account how the actions of the president, judiciary, or other political figures may influence public perspectives on government. Given that the outcome indicators measure general attitudes toward government, and the theory contends that governmental actions are consequential, it should be expected that actions of political figures outside of Congress would be consequential as well. While this may be the case, the exclusion of these measures does not take away from the power of the findings. The fact that these measures are not included adds to the power of the finding because it implies that actions of Congress alone seem to push public opinion, but if the theory is accurate, an index of actions across all branches would explain even more of the variance.

While the findings here do indicate a relationship, the causality argument is still quite tenuous. Because the actions indicators are aggregate and are not broken down by district, while the public opinion indicators are at the individual level, individual effects cannot be directly ascertained. Another data gathering project could offer such indicators. Regardless of this shortcoming, the contextual aggregate relationship appears

to be significant suggesting that individual level data may reveal the same relationship, but again, further data gathering is necessary to flesh out the nature of the relationship between actions and public opinion.

As normative theorists have contended that the public sphere is the domain of our social life where such a thing as public opinion can be formed, these findings have given support to the idea that the actions of Congress reside in this domain. Foucault's assertion that the state has influence over the realm of deliberation is perhaps true, but not in the way in which he argued. Rather than being a suppressing effect on public deliberation, Congress seems to have a positive effect on the way people feel about the structure within which they exist. Individual opinion is not autonomous from the structure within which it exists, and the actions that ensue within this structure are relevant. While the evidence presented here does not either offer support for the existence or non-existence of a public sphere, it does support the contention that the actions of Congress are an integral part of the formation of public opinion.

While Mayhew (2000) primarily sought to detail patterns in the actions of members with the goal of bringing further understanding to the nature of congressional behavior, his approach opened the door for this study, and potentially, a host of other inquiries into both the impact of these actions within the broader public sphere and within the legislature itself. This study is only a preliminary look at the potential implications of this new and innovative way of viewing Congress. More research can be done in the area of the transmission of information regarding these actions through social networks. For instance, it is likely that those who have stronger ties and more politicized social networks may be more influenced. More research can be done in other areas such as the

effects of the dynamics of actions and participation. Potentially, participation may increase with actions. Fluctuations in actions may also be related to vote choice. Cycles with high actions dominated by one party may lead to increased support at the voting booth. The areas for potential research are bountiful. Mayhew's unique perspective on Congress has offered a new approach and research agenda. For now, it can be clearly stated that there is a public reaction to congressional actions.



## Appendix- Types of Actions

The actions included in Mayhew's data set fit in the following categories: moves on foreign policy, move to block presidential efforts, member is mentioned as a leader, member tries to pass or block a bill, member's name is affixed to a bill, member's name is affixed to something other than bill, big speech, filibuster, member stood alone on some matter, tipping vote, member disclosed something of importance, member takes part in presidential appointment, member takes part in process to impeach or censure member of executive branch or judiciary, member takes part in process to censure or expel another member of Congress, member was alleged to have done something illegal or unethical, member was censured or expelled, member resigned, member represented a tiny party or unpopular ideology, member takes part in action to adjust rules, member takes part in action regarding procedural relations between the executive and legislative branch, member takes part in an investigation, member serves on a commission, member performs a judicial, administrative, or diplomatic role not envisioned by the Constitution as a congressional role, member has notable race or ethnicity, member engages in distributive politics, actor is chair of committee, member is mentioned to be on a committee, member is associated with a special committee, member advises president, member speaks for administration, member is appointed to position by president, member is appointed to cabinet position, member runs for leadership position in House or Senate, member runs for or is considered for president or vice-president, member takes action to help decide who will be the presidential selection, member takes part in party convention, member is important figure in state or local organization, member takes part in activity not addressed by preceding five categories, member takes part in action to mobilize public, member does something associated with congressional election, and member writes a politically relevant book, newspaper article, or magazine article.

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**Table 1- Correlation and Factor Analysis of Outcome Indicators**

	<b>Trust</b>	<b>Efficacy</b>	<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>Component Vector</b>
Trust	--	0.288*	0.364*	0.735
Efficacy	--	--	0.350*	0.723
Responsiveness	--	--	--	0.778

Source: American National Election Studies 1964-1988. 2-tailed test  $p \leq .01$ . Notes: Correlation is Pearson's  $r$  and the component is extracted using Principal Component Analysis.

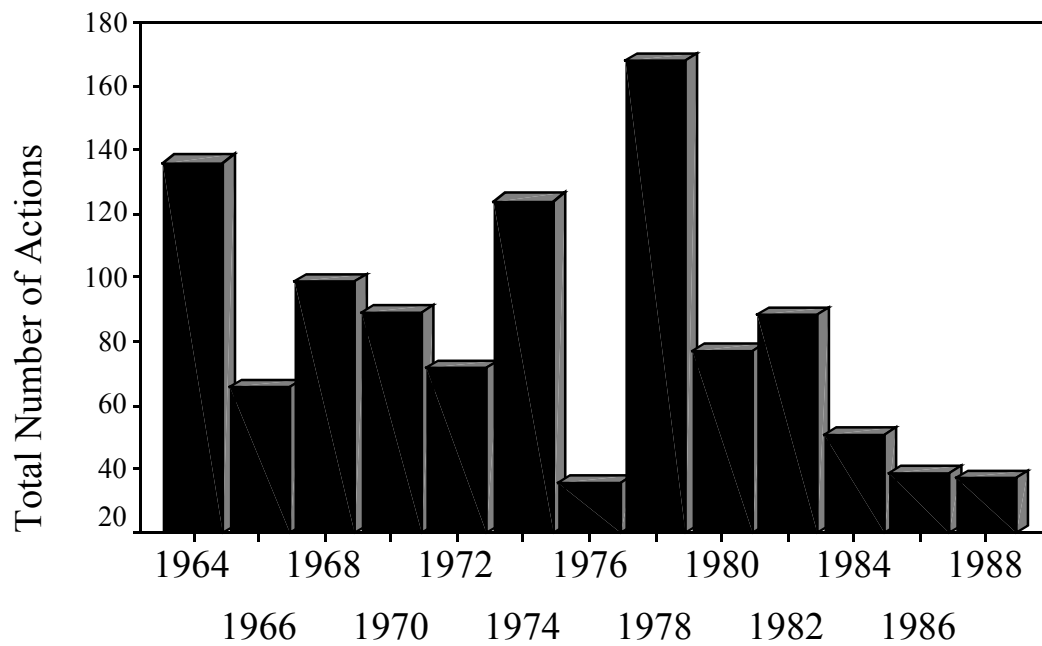
**Table 2- Pooled Time-Series Output of Attitudes and Actions**

	Trust	Efficacy	Responsiveness
<i>Explanatory Variables</i>			
Congressional Actions	0.001** (0.000)	0.001** (0.000)	0.002** (0.000)
Public Interest	0.106** (0.012)	0.120** (0.012)	0.106** (0.012)
Actions * Public Interest	0.001** (0.000)	0.001** (0.000)	0.001** (0.000)
<i>Control Variables</i>			
Democrat Identification	0.336** (0.115)	0.492** (0.119)	0.587** (0.115)
Republican Identification	0.388** (0.116)	0.592** (0.120)	0.625** (0.116)
Independent Identification	0.074 (0.119)	0.242* (0.123)	0.349** (0.119)
Affect Toward Parties	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.001* (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)
Socio-Economic Status	0.018** (0.006)	0.253** (0.007)	0.074** (0.006)
Prospective Finances	0.094** (0.015)	0.142** (0.016)	0.211** (0.015)
$X^2$	504.511	2473.904	1187.807
df	9	9	9
Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2$	0.024	0.113	0.054
N	24,263		

Source: American National Election Studies 1964-1988 and David Mayhew's data.

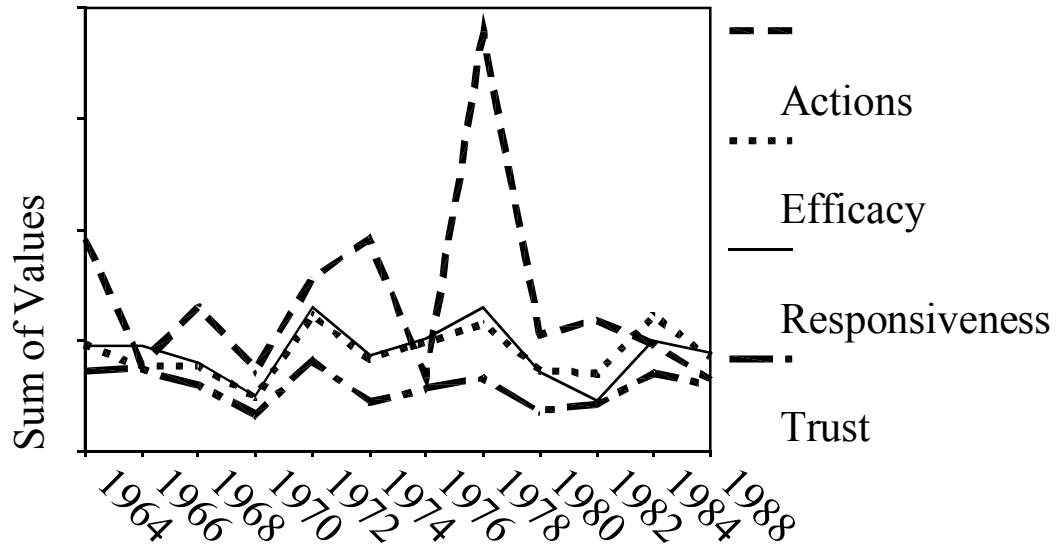
Notes: Coefficients are estimated using ordered logistical regression, missing values are mean imputed. 2-tailed test  $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ . (S.E.) S.E. < (0.001) reads (0.000). The 1988 legislative cycle was excluded from the trust model because the indicator was available in that year of the ANES study.

Figure 1- Actions by Legislative Cycle



Source: American National Election Studies 1964-88 and Mayhew's action data <http://pantheon.yale.edu/dmayhew/datasets.html>.

**Figure 2- Actions, Efficacy, Trust,  
and Attitudes about Responsiveness**



Source: ANES 1964-1988 and Mayhew's Action Data available at <http://pantheon.yale.edu/~dmayhew/datasets.html>.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> These data along with a codebook can be obtained at David Mayhew's webpage at <http://pantheon.yale.edu/dmayhew/datasets.html>.

<sup>ii</sup> It is important to note the difference between internal and external efficacy to provide a clear explanation of what will be measured. Internal efficacy is an individual's belief that she has the general ability to influence the system. It has been asserted that the two are inseparable (Balch 1974), but others have proposed methods of separating the two (Shaffer 1981; Abramson 1982; Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991). Niemi, Craig, and Mattei were critical of the ANES items measuring internal efficacy. The measure of external efficacy is sufficient for this study because it is separate from the internal measures in ANES that they demonstrated to be insufficient.